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THE SOCIETY AND THE "FAD."

[Concluded from p. 286.]

And this, possibly, may be where the line is to be drawn between the usefulness of a poet or a dramatist to his own generation and date, and his value as an embalmer of manners to generations and dates long beyond him. Indeed, the very first piece of Shakespearian criticism extant¹ (it was written by John Aubrey prior to the year 1680, and I cannot see that the criticism of these two hundred or so years since has practically done any thing more than indorse it) represents Shakespeare in London in his own day, doing just exactly what Mr. Harrigan in New York has done in his. Shakespeare, who wrote "Hamlet," did not scruple to take his auditors into the tavern, the inn-yard, the bagnio, the jail; into the bum-bailiff's and the watchman's court, just as Mr. Harrigan has escorted his audiences into the slums, the opium-joints, the bar-rooms, the ten-cent lodging-houses, to the polls, the picnics, the chowder-parties, and the cheap excursions of the self-respecting newsboy and boot-black. The ears of Mr. Harrigan's audiences are treated less coarse-

¹ "He did gather humours of men daily, his comedies will remain witt as long as the English language is spoken, for that he handles *mores hominum*. He took in the humour of the constable at Grendon-in-Bucks which is on the road from London to Stratford."

ly than were those of Shakespeare. The nineteenth-century theatre-goer takes its Shakespeare extremely Bowdlerized. Doubtless Shakespeare went to a great many places where he should not, and where, had a Shakespeare society for the transcendental illumination of his works kept at his heels, he perhaps could not or would not have gone. But it is precisely because he did go to all these places, good or bad, untrammelled, that his pages are of such peculiar value to ourselves: preserving so much that but for him had been misunderstood, but which he recognized as worth the embalming; not minimizing for the sake of ears polite, nor yet distorting into prominence for the prurient, but simply embalming—life-size, as it was, and where it belonged—in the great *comédie humaine* of those matchless dramas. From courtier to courtesan, from commander to camp-follower, the sovereign, the soldier, the statesman, the merchant, the peasant, the clown—how they all talked and walked, and lived and died, Shakespeare has told us. King Henry discusses state-craft with his great ministers; we turn the page, and Pistol and Doll Tear-sheet are hurling Billingsgate at each other, with Falstaff as a mocking peacemaker; two carriers with lanterns are shifting their packs in an inn-yard, and talking of poor Robin, the last hostler, who is dead; another page, and Lady Percy, in Warkworth Castle, is pleading with the noble Hotspur to dwell less upon wars and big events,

"Of sallies, and retires; of trenches, tents,
Of palisados, frontiers, parapets;
Of basilisks, of cannon, culverin;
Of prisoner's ransoms, and of soldiers slain,
And all the currents of a heady fight"—

and to give some thought to wife and home and family. And in every one of these thirty-seven dramas there is the same rush of movement, the same panorama of life, of color, and of action, untrammelled and uninterfered with by any slightest hint that the poet preferred or enjoyed any one movement, class, or color, or life, to any other,—a simple photograph—and a negative untouched! And still from out this panorama may biographies be written, and still histories and sociologies unfolded, simply because this negative has not been tampered with. Here, too, is a faithful transcript of the progress of the date of the procession in which Shakespeare was marching along with the rest; and it is worth our while to pause a moment for an example of it. Observe that in the first quarto of "Hamlet" (1603) we have a stage direction, "Enter King, Queen, Corambis, and other lords;" in the second (1604) this entry is directed to be accompanied with "trumpets and kettle drums;" but, in 1623, the words "Danish March" are added to this stage direction. Here is a steady progress in realism: the play being Danish, the march was to be Danish also. Again in 2 Henry VI., in its first quarto form ("The Contention," etc.), 1594, Suffolk says to his captor,—

"Hast thou not waited at my trencher,
When I have feasted with Queen Margaret?"

But in the folio some thirty years later, Suffolk says,—

"How often hast thou waited at my cup,
Fed from my trencher."

This is a step in table etiquette. It came to be only the servant, and not the nobleman, who used the trencher. The